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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 000453

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PREL MASS AF TU

SUBJECT: TURKEY KEEN TO SHIP MORE IN NORTHERN DISTRIBUTION
NETWORK FOR AFGHANISTAN

Classified By: Pol-Mil Counselor A.F. Godfrey, reason 1.4 (b and d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Turkish officials and private shipping company reps who participated in a March 9-10 regional transportation conference sponsored by the U.S. European Command told us that Turkey wants to and can do more as a shipper and supplier for alternative northern supply lines to Afghanistan. They stressed that Turkish truckers have the capability to take on much more of the load and are already moving non-military supplies efficiently. On-going improvements at the main Turkey-Georgia border crossing will make that crossing more efficient, but road transit through Turkmenistan is currently so problematic it is almost impossible, they said. Turkey hopes to become a source for procurement of supplies and proposes a meeting for USG procurement officials with commercial suppliers in Istanbul. We believe that such a meeting would be useful and that Turkish truckers have the networks and capability to shoulder more of the load than they currently carry. End summary.

¶2. (U) At the EUCOM Transportation Partnership Conference held Baku, Azerbaijan, U.S. European Command (EUCOM) along with representatives from the U.S. Transportation Command (TRANSCOM), Defense Logistics Agency (DLA), General Services Administration (GSA), official delegations from Turkey, Georgia, and Azerbaijan, and representatives from over 20 private shipping companies met to discuss regional sources of supplies and northern land supply routes for Afghanistan. The purpose of the conference was to discuss transport and sourcing in the southern Caucasus region in order to establish efficient alternative routes to ground lines of communication through Pakistan. TRANSCOM briefed on two primary northern routes currently in operation, one from Latvia, through Russia, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan and a second from Georgia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. Turkish, Georgian, and Azeri delegations presented overviews of their respective national transport infrastructures. Turkish shipping companies stressed that their current capabilities to carry non-military supplies overland from Turkey to Afghanistan, and emphasized that they are already doing so. Focus was on four classes of non-military goods and supplies including: non-perishable foodstuff, office related equipment and supplies, and construction material and equipment, notably lumber. Shipment of military equipment

was not formally discussed at the conference.

TURKS KEEN TO SHIP MORE

¶ 13. (U) The official Turkish delegation was led by Transportation Ministry Deputy Undersecretary Suat Aka and included MFA Deputy Director General for Maritime and Aviation Affairs Basat Ozturk; Colonel Tamer Ozmen, TGS J5 Americas Director; Mustafa Esen, Customs; Umut Demirci, EU Expert at Transportation; and diplomats from the Turkish Embassy in Baku. Turkish shipping firms participating included: Adana Ekspres, Truva International, Asya International, and Piril International.

¶ 14. (U) The Turkish presentation emphasized the size and efficiency of Turkey's national transportation network, comprised of a commercial fleet of over 2,500 cargo ships, 177 ports on over 8,000 km of coastline, an extensive international-standard highway system, and Europe's second largest (after Germany) and youngest fleet of commercial trucks. Turkey's rail system is its weakest segment, although completion of the Bosphorus rail tunnel linking Europe and Asia, and the Kars-Tbilisi-Baku rail line, both anticipated by 2011, will make a new trans-Eurasian rail route possible. Turkey has 67 commercial airports, four of which the delegation identified for possible use for air supply operations for Afghanistan: Corlu, near Istanbul; and three airports in eastern Turkey: Sivas; Erzerum; and Sabiha Gokcen. They proposed a seaport-airport connection option using Tekirdag port, (100 kms west of Istanbul on western

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shore of the Sea of Marmara), approximately 50 kms from Corlu civilian/military airport, which could be used for loading cargo for onward flights to Afghanistan; and seaport-land connection using the eastern Mediterranean ports of Mersin or Iskenderun, which are linked to rail and road routes to the Georgian border for the overland route.

THE ROAD EAST OF TURKEY

¶ 15. (C) The Turkish delegation flagged improvements currently underway on both sides of the main border crossing with Georgia at Hopa which they said will make commercial truck crossings faster. Beyond physical improvements at the crossing, Turkey hopes get Georgia to agree to a more streamlined customs process akin to French-Swiss border arrangements, they said, but does not expect this to be accomplished in the short term. They told EUCOM J4 Logistics Chief RADM Steve Romano privately that as a strong political supporter of Georgia and Georgia's largest trading partner, Turkey is not suggesting that the Georgian Black Sea port of Poti be bypassed in favor of Turkish highways, but argued that the overland route across Turkey has greater capacity to move supplies and would thus be more efficient.

¶ 16. (C) On the route beyond Azerbaijan, Turkish officials expressed concern about transiting Turkmenistan. West to east road transit is currently so problematic for Turkish truckers that it is nearly impossible, they told us. Their route of choice from Baku is by ferry across the Caspian to Kazakhstan. They underscored the need for more scheduled Caspian Sea ferry service.

¶ 17. (U) While they were eager to meet with U.S. agencies to discuss the two routes described above, Turkish shipping company representatives suggested that the most efficient -- and the least expensive by far -- way to ship goods to Afghanistan would be overland through Iran. They believed that freight forwarding firms could source non-sensitive consumer goods in Turkey and have them in Afghanistan relatively quickly. They acknowledged, however, the sensitivity of this route in the current environment.

SOURCING SUPPLIES IN TURKEY

¶ 18. (U) Turkish officials and shippers made a pitch for

sourcing supplies needed in Afghanistan in Turkey. They urged that US procurement agencies examine the Turkish market and proposed a conference be held in Istanbul to better acquaint U.S. agencies with the availability and pricing of products in Turkey.

19. (C) Comment: Turkish officials were prepared to hear specific proposals for routes through Turkey, which they did not get. They and their private sector colleagues clearly want a bigger piece of the action of the northern distribution network, in both sourcing and shipping. For non-military supplies and equipment, Turkish trucking firms have the experience and capability to shoulder more of the load than they currently carry. The cumbersome Turkish Defense Approval process is not required for commercial goods and supplies sourced in or shipped through Turkey.

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